2 games, 2 books make good gifts

Holiday gifts for your computer-obsessed friends this year might include a challenging computer chess program, an unusual 3-D space game or, slightly more serious but at stocking-stuffer prices, two readable computer books.

Prices for these products range from $5 to $50.

■ Chessmaster 2100, at $49.95, is one of the most highly regarded of all computer chess programs. You can adjust the level of play from newcomer to grand master. Then you can set up the playing board as either a two-dimensional overhead view, or a three-dimensional view that simulates sitting in front of an actual board.

Optional features include the ability to time moves with an on-screen clock, change sides at any time, replay any of 110 classic games on-screen, take back and replay moves, get instant help on any aspect of the game, and even learn how to play the game from scratch.

Chessmaster 2100 claims to have a library of more than 150,000 opening positions and it

BUSINESS TOOLS

Hillel Segal

will even recognize and announce which opening you use. If you just want to watch a high-level game played, you can watch as Chessmaster 2100 plays both sides.

■ If you've ever purchased a computer book, you know they generally cost $20 and up and are hundreds of pages long. "Easy DOS It!" and "Hard DOS It!" are two soft-cover books that deal with the basics of DOS and hard disks at only $5 apiece!

"Easy DOS It!," at 78 pages, presents DOS fundamentals in a readable format. Basic topics such as computer memories, the anatomy of a floppy disk, warm and cold boots, logging on to a drive, naming files, and formatting floppy disks are covered in a brisk but conversational manner. Other DOS commands covered include DIR,

CHKDSK, REN, DEL, COPY, BACKUP and SYS. Clear illustrations and reminders framed in boxes make this an excellent quick reference for any user.

For slightly more advanced users, "Hard DOS It!," at 138 pages, delves into hard disk usage. Commands like FORMAT, COPY and BACKUP are re-explained in light of their hard disk use.

A chapter on batch files hand holds the user through the creation of an "autoexec.bat" file. Discussion of some advanced commands round out the coverage of DOS.

■ Beyond the Black Hole, is a unique $49.95 game that produces a 3-D effect on the screen. It claims to offer the first stereoscopic, three-dimensional computer display for personal computers.

The catch, as with 3-D comics and 3-D movies, is that you have to wear special glasses to get the full effect. But unlike conventional 3-D processes, the screen looks normal without the glasses.

The game, which claims 35 levels of play, is presented with excellent graphics and sound effects.

The program includes a 36-page booklet detailing the history of 3-D with numerous examples of 3-D photographs and comics. For anyone whose been a 3-D fan in the past, this game is a must.

■ The Bottom Line: While the 3-D game was unusual, I'm not big on playing fantasy games.

Playing chess, on the other hand, appeals to me. I think the Chessmaster 2100, at the same price, is the more amazing game.

I would recommend the two DOS books as inexpensive gifts for the beginner to intermediate user.

"Easy DOS It!" and "Hard DOS It!" are available from Easy Way Press, P.O. Box 12041, Birmingham, Mich. 48012; (313) 651-9405.

Chessmaster 2100 and Beyond the Black Hole are available from Software Toolworks, 19808 Nordhoff Place, Chatsworth, Calif. 91311.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.